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Dissertation, Passed March 15th 1825

on

Bilious Remittent Fever,

by

Francis M. James

of

South Carolina.

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This form of disease is peculiarly interesting to the southern practitioner. Its annual depredations and the utter defiance at which it frequently places all the resources of his art, render a minute acquaintance with its phenomena, and rational principles for its treatment, points of knowledge essentially necessary to him.
As distinguished from the intermittent, it may be defined a fever made up of paroxysms between which there is no entire apyrexia, though there is some degree of remission and exacerbation daily. The systematic writers have usually divided its causes into the predisponent and exciting, and among the former of these may be noticed the marsh miasmata. That Intermittent & Remittent fevers have a common origin in this cause though in different degrees of it appears to be the received opinion. In temperate seasons and in those

climates where the greatest heats do not prevail, and where the nature of the soil is unfavorable to the abundant extrication of Miasmata, Intermittents are the most frequent form of fever. But in those which are alternately scorched by fierce heats and drenched with heavy rains, where Miasmata exist in an extremely concentrated state, we are presented with Remittent fevers of various types and various degrees of malignancy. Although Miasmata are probably the most frequent source of this fever, yet it is often dependent on other causes. It is thought by some writers that the influence of great atmospheric heat alone is capable of producing it. Against this opinion we have the authority of Fordyce; and in support of his assertion he appeals to the fact, that the countries which lie to the north of the Cape of Good Hope which are among the hottest on earth, yet being also

very dry fevers are not remarkably prevalent. And likewise that certain classes of artisans who work in rooms heated to upwards of 150° Far. are by no means peculiarly subject to Fevers. Later and more extended observations however shew, that the most malignant forms of fever are endemic in many tropical countries, where no other adequate cause for their production could be assigned, than excessive atmospheric heat.

From the circumstance that they frequently prevail over extensive tracts of country, not confined to low grounds or marshy situations, but often avoiding them and clinging to those of opposite character, they have also been ascribed to epidemic influence. On this point however our knowledge is as yet limited, the peculiar nature of this influence or its dependence on the seasons has not been ascertained, and the most that is left us is but conjecture. There are a variety

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of other causes which are thought by Cullen, to act in most instances by coinciding with the operation of miasmata. Among these may be mentioned excessive fatigue from great mental or bodily exertion, the depressing passions, excessive evacuations, late watching, and probably whatever debilitates the system generally. An attack of this fever is usually induced, by some indiscretion in diet or in the use of ardent spirits, sleeping in an exposed situation, getting wet from a shower of rain, not to mention a variety of other causes.

This is a disease of such various aspect from its important diversifications by climate local origin and idiosyncrasy, that it would be difficult to give a character of it which would universally apply. But as it ordinarily presents itself, it commences with most of the

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phenomena of Intermittent fever. There is a disposition to yawn & stretch, with a sensation of weariness in the limbs, pain in the back & loins, and usually some affection of the stomach with nausea or vomiting of bilious matter. At times there are well defined chills with violent rigors, more commonly there is a mere sensation of chillness with alternate flushes. After these have continued an indefinite [illegible], fever is established, [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible], alternating [illegible] the body, the skin [illegible] & dry, much thirst, a [illegible] or [illegible] suffusion of the [illegible], the tongue [illegible] [illegible] with a white or dark brown fur, the urine is high colored and in diminished quantity. The bowels are for the most part costive, or when there are discharges, they show evidence of [illegible] of the biliary secretory. In the

Fever advances, the intermittent to the mind is increased inducing various degrees of cerebral affection, the skin and eyes become of a yellowish hue, the nausea and vomiting is increased with heat or pain in the epigastric region. In the progress of the fever during the course of twenty four hours, other phenomena present themselves. There are a remission of all the symptoms, which takes place in the morning attended with slight perspiration, which however gives but little relief. The fever gradually rises and the exacerbation is at its minimum towards the evening. The complicated exacerbations do not always occur at regular periods. They observe more regularly the manner the fever approaches the Intermittent form: In certain cases when it has more the type of continued fever, they occur at irregular intervals, frequently several in the course of the day.

The terminations of this fever are either into Typhus, Intermittent, or Febricula or it may admit of solution by our remedies, and where the attack is not violent, by the efforts of the natural powers alone.

The most important of practitioner will be found be able to form a correct Diagnosis, by attending to the predominance of bilious symptoms in the disease, the season of the year and the local position.

In our Prognosis it is necessary to take into consideration, certain periods in fevers which were much insisted on by the older Physicians, and which indeed have obtained the sanction of many of the most eminent modern authorities. The critical days of Hippocrates, so called from his giving an accurate description of them, are the third, fifth, seventh, ninth, eleventh, fourteenth, seventeenth and twentieth. Each

critical day, may serve as an indication to the on looking 1. That if a patient finds himself either on a critical day, or may look for a still more favorable change on the critical day succeeding, and if on the contrary he finds himself worse on such a day, his situation will be still more unfavorable than one which follows it. Again "if on the critical days the violence of the symptoms in much increased, we dread a fatal termination and we look for recovery or more distant according to the degree of exacerbation."
The circumstances denoting a favorable termination are, the pulse becoming fuller, slower, less irritated and more natural, the skin assuming a perspirable and moist condition, determination to the heads ceasing, the irritability of the stomach quieted, the urine assuming its natural secretions, the urine depositing a copious sediment,

and the mental [illegible] become [illegible] disturbed.

The anteparoxysmal symptoms are involuntary twitchings or startings. These are usually the harbingers of general convulsions, in which the patient expires. Much worse is the mental affection. Impossible to have no Delirium: the stomach extremely irritable with great tenderness of the Epigastrium, preternaturally thin and in every stools without order or extremely offensive with a total absence of bile in them, an irregular distribution of temperature as cold wrists and hot hands or palms, are symptoms indicative of the almost certain extinction of life. In this fever females, just in a healthy type, are exposed in such cases usually to abortion by the same circumstances, which [illegible] in [illegible] or premature birth.

The appearances on post mortem examination

in varied. If the inflammatory symptoms have run high during the disease, we may expect to find inflammation or the consequences of it, in the mucous coat of the stomach and Duodenum. The brain, too, and spinal cord generally more or less deranged, most frequently by congestions in them, and the gut Bunchard issuing bursts with a mucus or dark coloured bile.

In the treatment of this disease, the first remedy that claims our attention is Bloodletting. The mists of prejudice which for a while obscured its value, have now passed away or they only exist in the fears of the vulgar. The extent to which it is to be carried must be left to the judgment of the practitioner, though the circumstances demanding its use are readily made out. Where the patient is restless, with a dry and hot skin, an active and corded pulse, with much

determination to any particular organ, the propriety of the measure is sufficiently manifest. Much discrepancy of opinion exists, with regards to the use of the lancet in the Remittents of sultry climates. From the circumstance of their running their course so rapidly, and the symptoms of extreme debility which they so readily put on, many have been deterred from its use altogether or have only used it under the strictest limitations. But it should be recollected, that the violent excitement which exists in the commencement of these fevers, is of itself a highly debilitating cause, and enfeebles the patient much more than a well timed bloodletting, which is our most efficient agent in the reduction of this excitement. According to some writers, during the exacerbations and when it is at its heighth, is the best time to resort to this evacuation.

Under these circumstances it is better [illegible] by the patient, and much more permanent and effectual relief is obtained from it during the following day. If we bleed during the remission says Dr Johnson, when the system is as it were in a state of collapse, Delirium mania followed by a train of nervous symptoms are often the consequences. In aid of venesection, topical bleeding by cups or leeches may be resorted to with much advantage. The detraction of blood immediately from the part affected, has a much more prompt and decided effect in relieving congestions or inflammations, and it may also be exceedingly useful where the apprehensions of debility deter us from general bloodletting.

Evacuations from the stomach and bowels, is likewise an indication of primary importance. In many instances it would be

necessary to determine, whether they should precede or follow venesection. In the early stages when fever is not completely established, we may, by the exhibition of Emetics or Purgative medicines, remove the cause at once to the disease. At a later period however when the sanguiferous system is involved, venesection should be premitted. Evacuations from the stomach and bowels are demanded, where to the circumstances which determine the necessity of blood letting, are added a loaded tongue and constipated bowels. Emetics are given when it is at the very early stages of the fever. Their effects we are taught, are not limited to the mere evacuation of the contents of the stomach. They break the morbid associations which exist in fevers, restore the secretions and produce an equable distribution of blood throughout the system. By after their employment

the stomach and the tongue
is clean, a cathartic is then indicated.
If there are no circumstances which contra-
a further use of emetics, we may resort to the
purgative medicines. Great discretion in our
employment of them is necessary. If excitement
should be great, we exhibit those articles best
calculated to reduce this excitement, such as those
Cathartics in combination with one or more of the
drastic Cathartics, appears to have most evidence
in its favor. The remission should be selected
as the time for administering the medicine.
If given during the exacerbations, it is apt to be
rejected by vomiting or it lies on the stomach
without operating, producing extreme distress to
the patient. To aid the operation of these articles,
enemata may be employed with much advantage,
and the middle of these two answer best.
In the exhibition of purgatives a circumstance

pointed out to us by Dr. Schneiman, should not be overlooked. It frequently happens that through copious vomiting & fecal discharges are induced, the fever does not abate, the head is still affected, the stomach excoriating, and the tongue loaded. The mucous secretion from the thick membranes of the intestines descending to the stomach, the mucous, which is essential to the secretion of gastric juice in the second coat. It allows the only means of cleansing the intestines, which should always prove an irritant in the stomach. It is carried off by cathartics & some are of the natural kind. By this brief sketch many of facts, deductions are brought forward, which are sufficient to show that a great injustice has been done upon the stomach. Strong, third, therefore, evacuate the stomach, by stimulating emetics, to demulcate excitement by the opposed demulcent that we have, and to

Keep the bowels in a healthy condition, some one of the neutral salts with a small proportion of Cream of Tartar, are [illegible] for allaying [illegible], and in case of recession arresting the [illegible], must at the last be paid by medical Physicians to [illegible] bathing. The circumstances which should influence us in the employment of it are, when the heat is steadily above the natural standard, the pulse active, and the skin dry or with only partial sweats. As the several modes in which the cold bath is given, [illegible] the [illegible] or simply water, [illegible] the sitz bath and [illegible]. The [illegible] [illegible], causes a more [illegible] [illegible], and its effects are not to be [illegible] in those suffering from sudden [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible]. With the same [illegible] when the excitement is very great, may be given [illegible] of water either

calds or lepra. The use [illegible] found a too [illegible] in this [illegible], and by it the [illegible] too low. In third stage of the [illegible] also used the [illegible]. The [illegible] is most commonly [illegible], which [illegible] with [illegible] & Calomel constitute the well known [illegible] treatment. [illegible] the [illegible] medicines. [illegible] by the foregoing [illegible], we need [illegible] to the [illegible]. Our intention however is not [illegible] to [illegible] the [illegible], nor to the [illegible] that a [illegible] of [illegible] induced [illegible] to the [illegible] of [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] much [illegible]. The critical [illegible] which take place in [illegible], [illegible] in [illegible] in [illegible] is the [illegible] of the [illegible] of [illegible]. But the [illegible] have indicated, are supposed to [illegible] specific powers, independently of their effects in [illegible]

perspiration. [illegible] usually employed. Some [illegible] with regards to the mode of [illegible] this medicines. It was the opinion of Cullen, that its remedial powers depended upon an impression being made on the stomach by [illegible] or vomiting. But it is stated by Forbes, and the propriety of the practice is much [illegible] Dr Coindman. That administering in low [illegible], [illegible] the stomach [illegible]. [illegible] the stomach [illegible], in a large [illegible] the stomach will bear without its creating nausea or vomiting, the antimonials being here [illegible] efficacious in their action, as the same [illegible] that mercury, bark or [illegible] are in the cure of other diseases. [illegible] the [illegible] of [illegible] with [illegible]. But we are [illegible] that [illegible] to [illegible] the [illegible] powers

[illegible] a great objection to [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

Considerable remissions have appeared, it may be given to prevent the returns of the exacerbations, on the same principle that it is given in Intermittents; and further that it may be employed in the advanced stages of Continued Fever, when all suspicion of an inflammatory state is removed, and a general debility prevails. There are other circumstances however, which should influence us in the employment of this article, it is not to be given unless the tongue is pure and the skin in a moist or perspirable condition. There are other Tonics which are perhaps used with better effects, these are the Angustura, Serpentaria, Eupatorium Perfoliatum &c. In southern climates where the hepatic apparatus is always more or less implicated, or where the disease is intractable to the other remedies, the acid Mercury is demanded. It will be restore the healthy secretions of the stomach & liver, as to

subdue the remains of the fever by its setting up its own peculiar action, is this remedy indicated.

There are yet other considerations in the treatment of this disease, of too much importance to be passed over. The strict antiphlogistic regimen that is demanded renders it necessary that all additional sources of excitement should be guarded against. All exercise of the mind or body is to be avoided. The patient should be placed in a large & airy chamber, the light excluded and no more attendants allowed than are absolutely necessary, and his bed clothes & linen should be frequently changed on the increase which almost always exists. Nature points out the course to be adopted with regard to aliment. It should consist for the most part of acidulated drinks, which should be given in small quantities, so as not however to oppress the stomach and create vomiting. These are

the palliatives of the painful sensations of thirst, a constant attendant of this fever. The thirst besides rendering the patient extremely uncomfortable is a powerful stimulus, it should as much as possible be diminished. In many instances it arises from a foul condition of the stomach, or a vitiated state of its mucous coat. In the first case an Emetic is indicated in the latter we should correct the state of the mucous tissue with minute doses of Calomel, or some one of the Antimonials Nausea is another affection, which is perhaps the most distressing in this disease. It may be owing to the presence of bile in the stomach, or to mere irritability of that organ. Should it depend on the former of these causes, which may be known by a bitter taste in the mouth with now and then bilious vomitings, it may be relieved by cleansing the stomach with gentle Emetics, as warm water, Chamomile tea &c. When it arises from

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irritation, we have a variety of remedies. Among them may be enumerated, the Effervescent draught, Seltzer water, Lime water & milk, the sugar of Lead with a small proportion of Opium, Most of the essential oils, Pepper vinegar, an old opium pill or anodyne enemata. External applications are also to be made, as a Pediluvium of warm water & mustard, Sinapisms, fomentations or finally a blister over the abdomen. Such are the remedies we bring into requisition in combatting this disease. Should they prove ineffectual, and the case degenerates into a typhoid fever, the same indications that are presented for the treatment of genuine Typhus, are here equally applicable. As the Bilious Remittent Fever prevails in any active state; & in those forms I have been accustomed to witness, we have too frequently to lament the inutility of our remedies. Carolina yet mourns the loss of many of her most valued citizens, who afford melancholy instances of its fatal power, triumphing over all the obstacles, which art could suggest to arrest its progress.